

**Mendelssohn, Schumann & Dvořák**

**Thursday, November 14 – 7:30 pm**

**Michael Stern**, conductor

**Andrew Wan**, violin

**SCHUMANN**

***Manfred, Op.115: Overture***

(13')\*

**MENDELSSOHN**

***Violin Concerto in E minor, Op.64***

(30')\*

Allegro molto appassionato

Andante

Allegro non troppo – Allegro molto vivace

**INTERMISSION** (20 minutes)

**DVOŘÁK**

***Symphony No. 7 in D minor, Op.70***

(36')\*

Allegro maestoso

Poco adagio

Scherzo: Vivace

Finale: Allegro

program subject to change

\*indicates approximate performance duration

***Manfred, Op.115: Overture***

**Robert Schumann**

(b. Zwickau, Saxony, 1810 / d. Endenich, 1856)

First performed: June 13, 1852 in Weimar

Last ESO performance of the overture: January 1996

In the years following the overthrow of Napoleon, a new era of national identity and pride dawned in the German-speaking world. The rulers of Prussia were loud in their declaration of a German nation, and a desire for German art for the German people took hold. The way seemed prepared with the success of

Weber's opera *Der Freischütz* in 1821, yet the establishment of a German school of art still proved elusive.

"Do you know what my artistic prayer is, each morning and evening? German opera!" So said Robert Schumann in 1842 – two decades after Weber's opera. He, along with many other German composers, tried to put German stories and folk tales on the stage, in their language, with limited success. Schumann himself managed only one opera – *Genoveva* (1850). It closed after only three performances, discouraging him from the form after that. He would write a few oratorios and other vocal works, including the hybrid work, *Manfred*.

*Manfred* is based on a dramatic poem by the English author Lord Byron. Originally intending it to be a more fully fleshed-out stage work, Schumann's musical rendering of it was eventually called *Schumann's Manfred. Dramatic poem by Lord Byron*, and scored for soloists, mixed chorus, and orchestra. "The overture is the most densely composed as well as the most effective, relevant and rewarding of the fifteen numbers which go to make up the *Manfred* music," writes scholar Hanspeter Krellmann, and indeed it is by far the excerpt by which most know of Schumann's depiction of Byron's work.

### ***Violin Concerto in E minor, Op.64***

**Felix Mendelssohn**

(b. Hamburg, 1809 / d. Leipzig, 1847)

First performed: March 13, 1845 in Leipzig

Last ESO performance: Symphony Under the Sky 2016

Felix Mendelssohn arrived in the world at a house in Hamburg where, only a year later, in that very same house, a boy named Ferdinand David was born. Mendelssohn became one of the greatest composers and conductors of his day, while David became one of its most gifted violinists. The two also developed a close friendship although they did not meet until Mendelssohn was 16 and David 15.

In 1835, the 26-year-old Mendelssohn, as the new conductor of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, appointed David to the position of concertmaster. In 1838, Mendelssohn wrote to his friend, "I should like to write a violin concerto for you next winter." Work on the concerto was slow, however, and it was not completed until 1844. David, naturally enough, assisted greatly with the violin passages, and in all likelihood shaped the lion's share of the cadenzas. The work finally premiered on March 13, 1845, but while David was indeed the soloist, illness kept Mendelssohn from conducting.

All three movements are played without a pause. After only a single bar from the orchestra, the violin makes its entrance, stating the elegant and passionate first subject. Violin and orchestra develop this, as well as a countersubject. The second principal theme of the movement is first presented on flutes and clarinets, over the violin's sustained low G. The development of this material is lavish, including some transcendent passages for the soloist.

The second movement also begins with only the briefest of orchestral introductions, ushering in a solo violin passage that ranks as one of Mendelssohn's most poignant melodies. The second subject contrasts with an agitated feel, but the violin restores the serenity of the movement by the end. A brief Allegretto non troppo leads to the vivacious and spirited Rondo finale, with a principal theme that is quintessential Mendelssohn: sprightly and effervescent, a vibrant conclusion to a work that stands as a cornerstone of the violin repertoire.

### ***Symphony No. 7 in D minor, Op.70***

**Antonín Dvořák**

(b. Nelahozeves, 1841 / d. Prague, 1904)

First performed: April 22, 1885 in London

Last ESO performance: March 2008

Two main sparks lit Antonín Dvořák's inspiration for composing his *Seventh Symphony*. The first was the wildly enthusiastic reception accorded his *Stabat mater* when it was presented in England in 1883, prompting invitations extended to Dvořák to return there. It was for a visit after being made an honorary member of the Philharmonic Society of London that Dvořák wished to have a new symphony ready for the occasion.

The other spark was ignited when Dvořák first heard the *Symphony in F Major* (No. 3), composed by his friend and mentor Johannes Brahms. It left a powerful effect on Dvořák, as well as giving him an artistic standard to aim for. "Everywhere I go," he wrote his friend Antonín Rus, "I think of nothing else but my work, which must be such as to shake the world, and with God's help it will be so."

It seems to have worked. The symphony was received rapturously at its premiere, and is still regarded by many as Dvořák's finest symphony. Its D minor home key lends it an air of serious purpose, beautiful as the music is. There is an elusive mysteriousness to the opening: restless and searching until the orchestral forces coalesce into a rolling main theme which, having finally announced itself, withdraws to make way for the more bucolic second theme, heard first in the woodwinds. The Development cleverly intertwines the two ideas, although the movement's climax brings back the broader main theme. The coda echoes the uncertain yearning of the opening – quiet and expectant.

The slow movement begins organically from this hushed conclusion. Woodwinds, again, take the lead in music that flows unhurried and across a varied landscape. Dvořák actually revised this movement following its London premiere, cutting a substantial number of bars until its proportions aligned with the work as a whole. "Not a superfluous note," he assured his publisher.

The Scherzo brims with Dvořák's Bohemian nature – the main song has the rhythmic elements of a Slavonic dance – more town than country, perhaps. By contrast, the Trio section – also ushered in on the

woodwinds – has more of the woods and meadows in its swirling colours. The final movement begins, as the opening movement does, in an air of mystery, out of which emerges a ceremonial theme, punctured by timpani and fraught with turbulence. A counter-subject seems to emerge out of material from this opening, altering the mood and rhythm. Its alliance to the main theme allows for a clever counterpoint as the Development continues, and the conclusion is, if not radiantly happy or joyous, strong and resolute.

Program notes © 2019 by D.T. Baker